

IMPRESSIONS OF A WAR FACTORY

By a Blind University Graduate

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BY A BLIND UNIVERSITY GRADUATE

“WELL, aren't you going to congratulate me?” I asked.

“Is it a matter for congratulation?” my friend replied.

Matter for congratulation, indeed! True I had just been given my first regular job—in a war factory—after years of unemployment following on a career at the University which had culminated in my graduating M.A. with first class Honors in English, and carrying off the James Eliot prize which is awarded for English to the best student of the year. I had then taken a Diploma in Education and a good teaching qualification—but all to no purpose. I am totally blind, and blind teachers are no longer required. Occasional tutoring, a little free-lance journalism, and a good deal of depression was all that had come my way. Now at last I had found work—and I was not elated!

The job is known as “burr-removing,” purely manual, requiring little enough skill. Heller's dark green overall seemed a shabby substitute for the academic gown. From some unsuspected cranny within me there arose a fierce flame of injured pride. Was this really I who so ardently despised snobbery in all its forms? Still, say what you please, it's unjust. Unjust indeed!—it is Lent, Christ stands before Pilate and is condemned to death—and is the handmaiden above her Lord?

¹ This article is the account of the author's experiences in a British war factory during the current year. Names and all identification marks have been changed for obvious reasons.

The first day begins at 8:30, forty-two minutes' grace, for every other working day must begin at 7:48. I wait, am presented with my over-all, which promises to be very hot, receive my worker's pass, am interviewed once more by the welfare adviser; irritation arises within me; this is far worse than the dentist's; why this appalling delay? They might as well begin the torture. We cross the grounds to the factory. It looks, someone subsequently told me, like an American prison; it feels like nothing so inviting, but rather like condemnation to the galleys. If only I could cut and run!

Noise of machinery, deafening, infernal! How great a hardship that is going to be when ears must in part deputize for eyes! To converse with one's immediate neighbor is possible, but everything at a distance is merged in a confused hotchpotch of sound like a railway station gone mad. I am introduced to Mr. Salterton, the manager of my department, and find that he comes from my own native town in the industrial north of England. He has come to Scotland more recently than I, and it is consoling to learn that our home town has “managed to absorb the Blitz,” and gone on its busy way. I refuse to concede that I am likely to find the work interesting. The supposition is simply absurd. Mr. Salterton, being sympathetic but not sentimental, pours oil on troubled waters; if only people would refrain from pretending that all is

Yet the arias and songs of such composers are precisely those that McCormack loves best, precisely those that most merit his service of the voice. Irish national music fares somewhat better; but even here the number of records in existence is but a pittance compared with the number that should exist.

It is our indelible conviction that the noblest single contribution any person or persons of means could make to the cause of music at the present day would be to see that John McCormack, despite his age, should make records of every piece of great music, classical and Celtic, written for or adapted to the tenor voice. The artistic and educational value of such a project would be incalculable. What though the voice has aged somewhat—the artist was never more skilled, and the spirit shines more gloriously than ever! For notice, the glorious voice is not all gone, the artistry is by now ineffable, and the spiritual understanding has continually progressed with the years; and it is this spiritual understanding that makes possible his service of the voice, that makes him a prophet of song. We pray that

somehow, sometime soon, posterity will yet be endowed, through the medium of records, with a rich garnering of his incomparable interpretations of the music most meriting his art, before the heaven-sent genius is gathered finally to the Source from which his radiance derives.

“Art is long, time is fleeting.” There shall never be another McCormack, never another in this generation to sustain the level to which he advanced the art of song, never another to convey with such clarity and intensity the secret movements of the heart, the musical symbolizations of eternal ideas. He, if no other, reveals to us why St. Thomas Aquinas places music at the pinnacle of the arts.

While there is yet time, let humanity capture for its unborn, in truly ample measure, the divine revelations which this century’s fairest voice can sound lest, like fallen angel feathers, its substance vanish forever, even as the vision of its brilliance is most blinding; or, like the Holy Grail, its glow forever fade, its questors proving unworthy.

MOUNTAIN LAUREL

BY ARTHUR WALLACE PEACH

THIS is a miracle that spring can work alone—
Bidding a granite ledge bear bud and bloom,
Finding a fragrance hidden in a stone,
Moving the ages to give a flower room!

well or will be the moment the war is over one's temper might get less frayed.

Next I meet Mrs. Taylor, the charge-hand at the burring bench, who will teach me my job. Christian names are the order of the day here, a gracious custom, and immediately she becomes Rosemary to me. Anne and Lucy and Flora, Gladys and Joan and Cecily become my friends in a flash, and work proceeds. It is almost distressingly simple, but very hard on the hands. By lunch time I have been startled by stinging pains resembling an electric shock. No good telling me to go easy—work is the only relief for overwrought nerves and brain. The day would seem unending if I took an occasional rest. The bench vibrates to the rubbing of files on steel; the girls come and go, from the burring bench to the machines and back again. How Rosemary fills in their time-sheets on the vibrating bench I cannot imagine, but she doesn't complain. Someone remarks that I shall raise a corn on my hand. I slacken my pace and alter my grip on the file. A corn on my fingers I certainly cannot afford for they too do duty for eyes.

I have heard a good deal about immorality and Communism and such things in factories; it does not seem to exist in Heller's. Many of these girls, of course, are not regular factory hands; they have been called up, and taken this work because it enables them to remain in their homes. It's a hard enough life, working long hours and taking your turn on night shift, but they are full of a keen sense of humor and what I can only describe as a natural gentility that touches the heart. Conditions are good in this factory which is of modern con-

struction; but it is galling sometimes to have to spend half a day waiting for work, then a job turns up and one must work overtime at high pressure till eight in the evening or on Saturday afternoon. Hard indeed, but it is difficult to see how such things could be avoided. There is no propaganda patriotism of the strutting, flag-wagging type; but a quiet concentration on business, and an occasional cheery grouse. The spirit, I fancy, is much like that of the trenches in the '14-'18 war.

Hum of voices in the canteen and more introductions. The food is good and wholesome though the sweet does taste, as Anne puts it, "like a shampoo smells"; there are no disastrous consequences, and tea and a cigarette obliterate the palate's uncomfortable reminiscence. We walk in the factory grounds, sunlit and fresh—funny, but I had not realized that it is a sunny day! Every breath of fresh air becomes precious beyond belief. In the cloakroom, where we foregather, having "clocked in" for the afternoon, my story slips out. "God gave you those gifts," says Lucy, "and you should be allowed to use them." Then, after weeks of depression, my heart was lifted up. For God is faithful, and, having richly bestowed, will not deny forever the use of His gifts in His service. What a fool I have been to despair!

In the afternoon Anne, seated at work by my side, speaks of books, and reading the life of Marie Curie and again my heart leaped up! I tell her of the book I am reading, on Poland, by Mr. Bernard Newman, and of Dante's *Inferno* which I am studying in Italian with the aid of an English translation; as a prepa-

ration for the life I am entering she voted it very good, and I try to remember for her what Dante says of Fortune. There is certainly nothing like manual work for clearing the brain. I admire the wisdom of St. Benedict who was the first to recognize its value in education. By the end of the day one thing stands out clearer in my mind than ever before: what seems to us but baffling frustration is simply a further stage in the training which Infinite Wisdom ordains.

So life at the factory goes on. The heat in the morning is stifling. The night shift is coming off work and the black-outs have just been taken down. As the day wears on it will become rather more endurable. Rosemary is there to greet me; she is always early, but Maureen and I have to run. We used to meet at the convent Mass in more leisured days; now we start out at seven, and manage to hear part of Mass at a church on our way to work. Then off to my job at the bench, amid the incessant buzz of machines. Yesterday I happened to mention that my chair was too high; Rosemary has substituted another, and is pleased when I remark the change. We speak of her family, her little dog, and the outsize dinner her sailor brother-in-law cooked the other day. Rosemary is shrewd and gentle; life has dealt her sorrows that have taught her a maturity of thought and action beyond her years. She has a quick mind and is very efficient at her work, but patient in teaching. Before coming to Heller's she did more highly skilled work which she greatly preferred; then she was given eight weeks' training of which she has made no use; this she naturally finds annoying. Yet she does her work cheerfully and

well, though it involves the almost impossible task of writing up time-sheets on the wildly vibrating bench.

The girl sitting next to me is married. I ask whether she has any children. No, her husband has left her; she doesn't know where he is. There is no bitterness or self-com-miseration; just a bald statement of fact, and a few days later she happens to mention how fond she is of children. This is the serious subject which I have most frequently heard discussed at the bench. There is frankly expressed disapproval for one girl who is going with a married man. Joan's sister, aged eighteen, has married a Polish soldier; Joan turns up next day with what looks like an outsize in lunch packets, but proves to be wedding cake of which we must all take our share. It tastes very good. Everyone sends congratulations. When Joan has gone, however, the serious aspect of the problem is discussed. Of course everyone hopes it will turn out well—there is no question of idle gossip—but as a general rule precipitate marriages, often of the very young, and sometimes between different races and nations, are becoming alarmingly common, and what will be the result? The impression I get is that more than anything else these women want to see the family life established on a solid foundation. They are inclined to be skeptical about the plans of the politicians who promise "the Kingdom of Heaven" after the war. They know too much of the world.

But the talk is not always so serious. There are things I must learn besides the technique of the work—for instance not to jump as if I'd been shot when the bell rings after morning or afternoon break; it's

bad form to hurry, and besides you'll tread on your neighbor's heels. One rises leisurely, delivers one's mug up at the barrier, and joins the slow procession down what Anne calls "Pipe Alley" because it carries the heating apparatus. A wit has named this procession Tottenham's (the manager's) funeral march. "But wouldn't you go faster than this on that occasion?" I ask. She concedes that she probably would. Not that I know the manager; no doubt he's quite inoffensive; none the less I feel I should all but run. "Will you walk a little faster said the whiting to the snail," I sing softly to Anne who laughs. But once we are back at the bench work proceeds with a right good will. I have brought a braille magazine which I read in the few minutes before the break after I have washed my hands. The girls go in rotation to wash, and having washed one must not continue to work, for the job is a very dirty one, so I get snatches of reading to lighten labor. I begin in these few minutes also to make braille alphabets for my friends at the bench. They are interested and attentive, and soon get the hang of braille; the little cards bearing the alphabet and their name they carry off proudly in their bats. When Miss Martin comes round she asks to be shown the magazine and, seeing one day that I have come without it and am enduring a spell of "waiting time," she gives me permission to bring a book and read during such times. So one morning I get through two cantos of the *Inferno*, though it is a little difficult to keep one's mind on the Italian with the machinery drumming in one's ears. When I am asked what I am reading, I confess a little

shamefacedly, feeling that my companions hoped to be told a story of adventure or high romance. But they are interested. I have reached, I tell them, the place where the angry people are punished. Rosemary considers this appropriate; she is, she says, very angry: "men have no common sense."

I make a slight slip with the file, and a tiny cut results. This is a common occurrence, and makes a pleasant diversion since all cuts must be covered on account of the dirt. Rosemary escorts me to the first-aid room which is cool and fresh, and quiet—oh, what a relief this cessation of noise! To come to this room is accounted a treat. It is always pleasant to meet people who have a vocation for their work, and of these the nurse is one. She has always some interesting subject for conversation as she binds up a cut, and her voice is as soothing as her fingers are gentle. But we can't stay here all day.

Little acts of kindness are multiplied. Mr. Salterton suggests that a lighter touch with the file might serve as well and spare my hands. I try it, but the effort is fruitless. I consult Rosemary. For this sort of steel it's no use at least with wartime files; "he ought to try it himself, men have no common sense!" "Never mind, Rosemary! next time I see him I'll ask whether these things are for this war or the next and he'll understand." I nurse my protesting fingers.

"By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way
comes."

Now I understand what Shakespeare meant by that, though I don't think he ever did this job.

"Perhaps I too am a witch; what will you all say if one day I fly off on a broomstick?"

"Oh, we'll come too, Elizabeth!"

I can hear someone asking questions in the House of Commons about so irregular a proceeding being allowed in a war factory.

Mrs. Turner sends up a caramel, and Rosemary divides her orange and gives a portion to me. Mr. Tanner, the foreman, says that I must not work overtime, a welcome release. I am doing enough work already, he says, and should have a better job.

"Now, Rosemary, he's got some common sense."

"I always said he had."

Lucy leans over the bench to tell me that Miss Martin has come in. With her usual thoughtfulness Lucy has realized that owing to the noise of the machinery I cannot hear Miss Martin's approach, and she does not want me to be taken by surprise.

Lucy refuses to be worried or flustered, but goes steadily on with her work. At the canteen she is nearly always last in the queue, because she refuses to push; but whenever there is a service to be rendered, Lucy is always there, and somehow she manages to make you feel that it is you who have conferred a favor. Her job is inspection, and she never fails to congratulate you when your work is good. She has a fund of amusing stories about Gale, her beloved collie.

This afternoon everyone is busy—scarcely time to talk. Some things are wanted in a hurry; the foreman flurries around. Anne is "floating around," as she puts it, "like a frantic fairy," her rich Cumberland accent goes ringing in my

ears, that sturdy English accent that echoes the keen humor and strong good sense she brought from her childhood's home more than twenty years ago. Until last summer she "did nothing" she tells me, which means that she simply kept house. She smiles with pleasure when I counter, "So that's what you call doing nothing!" My hands work busily on without the conscious co-operation of my head which is filled with far other matters.

Anne has transformed the factory; the humming machinery becomes the clatter of trains; the wheels go thudding in my brain—Carlisle, Penrith—now for the pull up Shap! It is evening, a few days before Christmas. My first term at the University has come to its end, and I am going home. This afternoon I sat an exam before catching the evening train; there were hot muffins for tea, and I am feeling drowsy and warm, and richly content. I have the carriage all to myself. Now for the time-honored ritual as the engine puffs and pants and we pull up Shap. Down comes the window, out goes my head—but not too far now that I'm grown up and supposed to have sense. It's snowing! the flakes are driven sharply against my face; lungs full of the sharp fragrance of Cumberland air, cheeks stinging, I begin to sing, softly at first, then louder—no one can hear—carols to match the season, though in those days I had little enough belief.

Then here I am, back in the factory, filing away for my life—for the hills and valleys of Britain that have held themselves inviolate since the Norman William came. I don't care for propaganda, and our country isn't the garden of Eden before

the fall, but I love the fine strong humorous independence of Anne and her kind. I pray then for the land that gave me birth, that she may retain her freedom from tyranny at home or abroad, for the gallant men who will use the weapons we fashion, for the Holy Father, and the preservation of Rome—and for my fellow workers, for the fields are white to the harvest.

Twelve minutes to twelve on Saturday, and hungrily home for lunch with a whole precious week-end be-

fore us! The larks are singing high overhead as Maureen and I go swinging down the road—too long to wait for the bus, but half way home we scramble into a tram—then off at the convent gates. We turn from the ceaseless throb of the factory to the busy silence of prayer, and find that the two are one. Today there is Forty Hours, and in the silent chapel awaits us a blessed repose, for here earth's labors and sufferings meet and merge in the glory of Heaven.

"THE WORD OF THE LORD WAS MADE UNTO JOHN"

—St. Luke iii. 2.

BY ELIZABETH HART, r.c.

SAY, does it echo now in Paradise,
That word that woke thee from thy hermit bed,
A vibrant word, like bees about thy head
Or Jordan dropping south with watery cries?—
Or seemed it Zachary's prophet song again:
"Thou, child, shalt bid make way for the Most High"?
Or did Isaias call: "A voice shall cry
From out the desert, 'Make rough places plain' "?

O dare we listen to that word above
All wonder: *John, I send thee to baptize,*
And thou shalt see My Spirit as a dove
Descending on the Lamb of sacrifice?—
And dare we ponder how thy heart beat fast
That thou shouldst hail the Orient at last?

THE RELIGIOUS VERSE OF JOSEPH CAMPBELL

By A. J. REILLY

THE late Joseph Campbell was the inheritor of the ancient Irish traditions of religious verse although Katharine Tynan Hinkson is frequently considered the only writer of religious verse produced by the Revival movement. Unquestionably some of her religious verse is exceptionally beautiful. All of it is devotional, simple, earnest. None of it is in what Thomas MacDonagh in *Literature in Ireland* calls the "Irish mode." In a word, it is undistinguishable from the verse of any poet writing in English.

On the other hand, Joseph Campbell's religious poetry, no less than his other verse, could have sprung only from the soil of Ireland. In both language and structure it is simple, but underlying the surface simplicity is a profundity of thought which makes comparison with Father Tabb seem natural. It has freshness and originality and the urgency and lift characteristic of early religious verse. Yet Joseph Campbell is not known as a religious poet.

Born and brought up in Belfast, his work retains the flavor of Ulster, as the stamp of the northern province remained on the man despite long residence in Dublin and New York. His first published work in 1904 was a collection of traditional Ulster melodies, *Songs of Uladh*, the music for which had been taken down from the lips of traditional singers of Donegal. To these melodies Joseph Campbell arranged English words, preserving the spirit and

traditions of the people. In the following decade he published five slight volumes of verse which clearly show the twin sources of his inspiration, the soil of Ulster and its people, the Faith of Ireland and its traditions.

The period from 1914 to 1918 gave little opportunity for "emotion recollected in tranquillity." There was little tranquillity in Ireland. Thomas MacDonagh had written in *Literature in Ireland*, "It will too that . . . the cause which has been the great theme of our poetry may any day call the poet to give their lives in the old service," and almost immediately was called with his comrades to give his life. There were other brave men to take their places. The poets became workers as MacDonagh had predicted. Joseph Campbell heard the call, too, and laid pen aside to serve the old cause in Ireland, in England and in America.

He came to this country in 1920 and for the next fifteen years lectured on Irish literature principally at Fordham University where he introduced American college students for the first time to the living cultural tradition of Ireland extending back without break almost to the dawn of history. The few American universities which hitherto had devoted any time to Irish literature concerned themselves only with the pagan period and the paganism of the Revival.

In 1940 Joseph Campbell returned to Ireland and to the Muse he had deserted at the call of the mother-

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